

X. Disaster and Advocacy Outreach Program

A. Introductory Material

The disaster advocate and outreach program is developed after a disaster to meet the special needs of older persons. Typically, persons are employed to serve as advocates and may work with older persons individually for as long as a year after the disaster. The purpose of the advocate program is to provide the assistance necessary for older persons to obtain access to needed services, and to provide the personal and emotional support necessary for frail or impaired older persons to work toward recovery. The functions of a disaster advocate are:

1. Development of a sound knowledge base of various relief programs.
2. Conducting interviews with older disaster victims.
3. The assessment of the individual's needs.
4. Provision of reassurance and emotional support to older victims.
5. Determination of the best resources for meeting the older person's needs.
6. Identification of individuals with needs exceeding the scope of existing programs and seeking assistance in finding ways to meet those needs.
7. Provision of on-going support and assistance in returning to normalcy.
8. Provision of assistance in obtaining disaster services after Disaster Application Centers have closed.
9. Assisting the individual in completing forms, negotiations and appeals.

10. Providing assistance to older persons in the Disaster Application Center.
11. Obtaining and helping provide interagency and public information.
12. Conducting door-to-door canvassing (outreach) to identify older disaster victims, with multiple visits if necessary. Encouraging and assisting them in using the teleregister system or the Disaster Application Center.
13. Continuing to conduct outreach efforts after the Disaster Application Center has closed.
14. Seeking to identify persons who have moved out of the area so that they can be notified of the opportunity to apply for disaster services.
15. Escort services for relocation and housing searches and to multipurpose senior centers.
16. Neighborhood searches to find isolated or "hidden seniors."
17. Follow up on lists of affected older persons received from other providers and agencies to assure that older victims are receiving services.

Alternative approaches may be used by States in a disaster response depending upon the resources and structures available. The same functions are performed, but social workers employed by State and local programs may be utilized instead of hiring advocates. In other situations, a matrix of existing programs may be expanded to perform the functions described. Sometimes, portions of all three alternatives may be combined to perform these services to older persons. While numerous approaches to the services may be used, it is important that the same functions are performed.

It is critical that disaster advocates work under the supervision of a disaster advocacy supervisor who has the educational and work experience necessary to help advocates determine when individuals need assistance, especially mental health assistance, beyond the scope of their capabilities. A team concept should be used with frequent, at least weekly meetings, to debrief.

A particularly important responsibility of Disaster Advocates is repeated efforts at follow-up. Older persons must be recontacted in person and by telephone as they may change their mind about receptivity for assistance or may not ask for additional assistance when assistance does not become available as anticipated. The training manual, "Disaster Advocacy: A Training Program" addresses these issues.